

## Consumers Union “*Best Buy Drug*” Website and Public Education Campaign FACT SHEET

The medical findings in the drug reports on the Consumers Union (CU) website are based primarily on a series of comprehensive and independent reviews of the scientific literature, and evidence on the effectiveness and safety of drugs in specific classes, such as drugs that treat high blood pressure, heartburn or high cholesterol.

These reviews were conducted by teams of physicians and researchers at the Oregon Health & Science University Evidence-based Practice Center as part of the Drug Effectiveness Review Project (DERP). This project is a first-of-its-kind, 12-state initiative to evaluate the comparative effectiveness and safety of prescription drugs.

CU will rely primarily on DERP’s ongoing monitoring of drug effectiveness research and safety studies for updates. DERP now updates its reviews annually. If rare events occur, such as the recent withdrawal from the market of the arthritis drug Vioxx, CU will update the relevant report or reports.

The Oregon research team has no financial interest in any pharmaceutical company or product. They have presented their findings in a series of highly regarded technical reports. A member of the Oregon research team, Dr. Mark Helfand, served as consultant to the CU *Best Buy Drugs* Project. His role was to explain the medical evidence from the DERP reports that related to Consumers Union’s criteria for effectiveness and safety. CU obtained drug prices from a healthcare information company that tracks the sales of prescription drugs in the U.S.

CU’s medical consultant interprets DERP’s medical evidence for each category. The pricing data used in the medical reports are from NDCHealth and are the national average price (per unit or pill) that cash-paying consumers pay for the most recent month available. The CU team (all of whom are required to comply with strict organization-wide conflict-of-interest rules) will select one or more *Best Buy Drugs* for each category.

The *Best Buy Drug* is a drug in the top effectiveness category whose average price is 25 percent lower than the most costly drug in the category. If there are two or more drugs that meet this test, then more than one will be a *Best Buy Drug* if its price is within 10 percent of the lowest price drug. At the completion of the first

year, CU plans to establish a schedule to update the medical reports (based on DERP updates and the nature of the changes in the literature); CU expects to monitor the prices for the drugs for each category and issue more frequent updates based on price changes if this is warranted.

*Best Buy* picks could change over time as new scientific evidence emerges and/or as drug prices change. Also, new generic drugs may become available in a given category as brand drugs lose their patent protection. CU's *Best Buy Drugs* staff will monitor such developments and drug prices monthly and make changes as often as warranted.

CU's reports rely on the average national retail price. Prices can vary substantially regionally. In addition, prices vary, and are often lower, for online pharmacy sales. For these reasons, CU urges consumers to consider these reports in the context of local prices. They might be able to identify a different effective drug that is available at a lower cost at their local drugstore. Also, insured consumers need to consider this information in the context of the health insurance (and co-payments) that they face from their health plan.

The drug prices CU cites and used to make the *Best Buy* picks are those paid by consumers in retail pharmacies who pay cash for their medicines. The prices reflect the nationwide *average* retail price paid for a medicine at the pharmacy. Being an average, the prices CU cites may be more or less than what you might pay for the same drug. They also could be more or less than the price paid by your health plan, of which you will pay a "co-pay" portion. If you are paying significantly more than the average price we cite, you may want to check other places you could buy the drug and talk to your doctor or pharmacist about the dilemma.

The prices CU cites do not include any adjustments for discounts negotiated by health insurers, employers or companies that manage pharmacy benefits for insurers or employers. They also do reflect any rebates that employer, insurers or pharmacy benefit managers may get from pharmaceutical companies to preferentially use their drugs.